

Carbondale News

Wednesday, August 17, 1983

# Gabriel P. Costanzo recalls his twenty years of working for Russell's Dairy, Belmont Street

By S. ROBERT POWELL

Gabriel P. Costanzo, 137 North Scott Street, began working for Carbondale's Russell Dairy Company in 1925, and worked for the company until 1945, when he began working for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

"I started out working as a helper at the dairy," Costanzo recalled, "and later on, about 1941, I took over Billy Fitch's milk route. The route encompassed all of the west side of Carbondale."

In order to get to the dairy on Belmont Street, Costanzo walked from his home on the west side. "Winter and summer, I walked," Costanzo told me, "and when the snow was bad in the winter, we'd start delivering milk not long after midnight so that we'd have the milk all delivered in time. When the snow was really bad, we'd use the sleighs."

"We also did all our own collecting," Costanzo recalled, "and when we collected, we sometimes wouldn't get finished with our routes until late morning. It was a long day. We could collect the money from our customers whenever we wanted. Mr. Russell let us decide that for ourselves. Usually we'd collect after the miners were paid, which was every two weeks."

The milkmen for Russell's delivered the milk with horses and wagons or sleighs until 1949, when four milk trucks were purchased by the Russell Dairy Company. Gabriel Costanzo's horse's

name Jim. "Jim was a mild mannered horse," Costanzo recalled, "and I always decorated him for holidays. On Memorial Day and Independence Day, I would attach American flags to Jim and to the milk wagon. On St. Patrick's Day, I'd give Jim a green hat and trim him and the wagon in green. "Bruce" was another of the horses at the dairy. We changed horses quite often. If the horse's temperament wasn't exactly right, we'd get rid of him, and get another. It was very important to have a horse that worked well, because the horse helped you out. My horse, Jim, and most of the horses, would do their routes all by themselves. They knew where to stop and they did so by themselves. A new man working on a route could take over very easily. All he would have to do is make sure that he delivered the right milk and milk products to the right house. As far as knowing where the houses were located, however, all he would have to do is follow the horse--the horse would take him where he had to go." Mrs. Ruth Emmons, Cemetery Street, told me that the horse that worked the Canaan Street route for Russell's not unlike Costanzo's horse Jim would also do the route by himself. "The driver would go in and out of the wagon and deliver on both sides of the street, and the horse would always stop in exactly the right spot," Mrs. Emmons recalled.

The drivers all hitched up their own horses and wagons. "We hitched up under the shelter at the dairy,"

Costanzo recalled, "and that way, we'd be out of the weather. There was only a certain amount of room, and so we hitched up one after the other: one man at 2:30, another at 3:00, and so on."

A complete line of milk and milk products were delivered to the houses along the different routes: white and chocolate milk, light and heavy cream, butter, butter-milk, and cheese.

I asked Gabriel Costanzo if he had a favorite flavor of ice cream that was made by the Russell Ice Cream Company. "Chocolate" he replied, "was and still is a favorite of mine. Russell's vanilla ice cream was also very good. It seems like it should be easy to make an uncomplicated ice cream like vanilla, but it's not. In the early days, the ice cream containers were all filled by hand." Costanzo then added: "It's a funny thing. I don't really care for milk at all, but I do like ice cream. When I worked for Russell's, we'd taste the ice cream before it was hardened. To this day, I like my ice cream melted."

Gabriel Costanzo's brother, Joseph, 163 Spring Street, also worked for Russell's. "Joe," his brother Gabriel told me, "was an extra man. He took over when one of the drivers was ill or on vacation."

At the close of my conversation with Gabriel Costanzo, he remarked: "Mr. Spencer Russell was a gentleman. He was a wonderful man to work for. I have some very nice memories of my days of working for Russell's Dairy."